

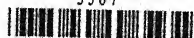
**HARIJAN LEGISLATORS :
THEIR ALIENATION AND ACTIVISM
(HARIJAN POWER : A CASE STUDY)**

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THEIR ALIENATION AND ACTIVISM
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Shiva K. Gupta

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HARIJAN LEGISLATORS : THEIR ALIENATION AND ACTIVISM*

(Harijan Power : A Case Study)

The Harijan power movement is a vastly significant socio-political movement which is contributing to the transformation of India and its people, high-caste as well as scheduled caste. Certainly, it is important and exciting enough to be studied and discussed in and of itself.

While we share in this specific interest in Harijan power, we approach it as one of a class of events which we term "alienation" and "activism", or, more simply movement of conflict and dilemma. We define such a movement as a group or collectivity of individuals who are organized and ideologically activated for and committed to the purpose of implementing fundamental change and/or condemning present conditions, who are actively recruiting new participants, and whose influence is growing in real or perceived opposition to the established order within which it exists. The 'established order' includes not only those who clearly profit from the maintenance of the status quo, but those who from apathy, caution, fear, dislike or other such motives are unwilling to be involved in movement activities although they might well profit from movement-generated change.

There are perhaps as many ways to define the term 'alienation' as there are social scientists who purport to analyze it. So much of contemporary social commentary and journalistic discussion alludes to individual expressions of alienation that efforts to narrow and specify the meaning of this 'catchall' term have not kept pace. What is particularly disturbing from the point of view of community analysis is that 'alienation' connotes invariably something which is pathological, harmful as a psychological state for the individual, undermining for the group as a basis of cohesion and esprit de corps.

I wish to take a rather different view of alienation. Seen in its historic role as the expression of injustice, oppression, and dissatisfaction with the existing values and structures of society, alienation is in fact a major force in constructive social and political change. I regard

* The material on which this paper is based was collected by the author between 1978 and 1979.

it as a sign of hope within a community when we mean specifically that individuals learn about their environment and focus upon its failings; this should be seen as a sign of hope and not despair within a community. Where individuals do not perceive their situation in other than immediate, eyeball-to-eyeball terms, contentment is merely a sign of isolation, not of well-being.

Analyses of social movements have characteristically explained movement activities and movement-generated change as consequences of certain socio-environmental factors or preconditions of deprivation and disorganization in the established socio-cultural system or in the personality of individuals. True believer Eric Hoffer (1951, 1963) is well known as an axe-grinding popularizer of such views. Linton (1943) and Wallace (1956) have contributed excellent anthropological classics of this type, while Lanternari (1963) follows a well-trodden path and shows how social and religious movements arise as a reaction to and compensation for oppression. Projects which seek to probe economic development and political reform to counter insurgent movements often are based upon stated or unstated assumptions that deprivation spawns insurgency, and insurgency is a malady to be eliminated through prophylaxis.

The power structure of any community is defined by the differential command that individuals and groups are able to exercise over the action of others and over the allocation and use of scarce resources. Although all Harijan power groups ascribe to a basic ideology of Harijan pride, Harijan unity, economic, and political power for the Harijan community, and self-determination, each group insists on its own ideological 'bag', develops its peculiar style and stance and 'does its own thing'.

Our approach is to regard these socio-environmental conditions of deprivation, disorganization, disequilibrium as at best movement-facilitating rather than sufficient or necessary. In fact it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that, as of now, the urban power structure is the state/national power structure in our society.

The theme of alienation as applied to the Harijan legislators may call forth images of relatively militants, neighbourhood activists, lower class characteristics or 'street dudes'. These are stereo-types of the kind that tend to appeal to the urban dominated mass media image makers.

It certainly is easier to try to deal with alienation in these individual terms or in most dramatic forms of protests, crime, or forceful demand for job reservations. What characterizes so much of the recent outpouring of analyses about Harijan legislators 'alienation' is the diversified gambit of its expression - virtually any behavior is ascribed to the rubric of 'alienation'.

This brings us to an important question : given the thesis of legislators' life generating various types of individual alienation, how can the specific form it takes for one person but not another be explained? Does it make any sense, for example to say in the same breath that Harijan neighborhood riots are due to the 'alienation' of younger Harijan youths and so is the relatively low voting turnout in local and state elections of this same group? How can a connection be made between the two phenomena? We could of course draw a parallel in terms of a hypothesis about 'Riot consciousness'. It is possible to argue that withdrawal of many Harijans from the established democratic institutions (grass-roots level) of the Harijan and high-caste and their refusal to riot/protest amount to 'alienation within the system'.

But there is a missing link in this type of argumentation. How is it that particular individuals come to the point of taking a 'system blame' versus a 'self-blame' approach to life? What are the sources for such perspectives? Does participation in the life of the Harijan legislators create such attitudes? Or is it rather that those who are at the periphery of the social structure of the Harijan community become the visibly alienated?

William Gamson's essay on POWER AND DISCONTENT provides a useful framework for approaching the question raised by Harijan legislators alienation. In this discussion Gamson suggests, for example, that the concept of political alienation deals with two often confounded elements : political trust and political efficacy. According to his argument, these may be defined as follows : "The efficacy dimension refers to people's perceptions of their ability to influence; the trust dimension refers to their perception of the necessity for influence". He further states :

Feelings of low efficacy and feeling that the government is not being run in one's own interest are of

course likely to be found together. If one feels he cannot contribute significant inputs he is likely also to feel unhappy with the outputs. But this is an empirical hypothesis which might prove false under some conditions. (1968 : 42)

The dimension of trust may lead to a high degree of non-participation according to Gamson's analysis. And it is related to the idea that non-voting or other signs of inactivity can "be a sign of confidence as well as of alienation" (1968 : 46). High trust in authorities implies some lack of the necessity for influencing them.

In this situation for example a number of studies by political analysts show that a maximum voting turnout is not necessarily the healthiest sign of a democracy. Where extremist groups of the right and left are brought into the arena and mobilized, the very fabric of a society is often torn asunder. Consequently, the notion of a relatively moderate degree of participation is viewed as the most desirable outcome and either extremely low or extremely high participation seen as indicators of the breakdown of the social order.

In contrast to the view of what occurs when there is a high degree of trust, Gamson suggests that :

Failure and frustration are frequently debilitating and demoralizing and increases in discontent can have an effect that is the opposite from mobilizing people. More specifically, a combination of high sense of political efficacy and low political trust is the optimum combination for mobilization, a belief that influence is possible and necessary. (1968 : 48)

Support for the thesis elaborated by Gamson can be provided by the present study of Harijan legislators of U.P. It is observed that Harijan legislators who are high on protest and militancy attitudes have very strong belief in their ability to control events in their own lives and to shape their own future. This radically new sense of self-efficacy in militants is juxtaposed with an increasingly realistic perception of those external barriers of neglect, discrimination, prejudice and exploitation which block any chance of actualizing their capabilities and realizing their aspirations. It also suggests that the combination of a heightend

sense of personal effectiveness and the shift from self to system blame, may help to explain the willingness of new Harijan legislators to resort to pressure as a means of forcing a change in the opportunity structure which at present otherwise excludes them.

In discussing the basis of protest behaviour it could be argued that external political tactics, like other forms of politics, require interest in government but, unlike conventional forms of participation imply that the government is fundamentally untrustworthy. The relationship between efficacy, trust and political participation depends not only on the characteristics of the group but on the relationship between the group and the political system. In other words, the increased awareness which may occur by belonging to state legislature and being in a community can provide the basis of 'alienation' where such involvement shows that the 'system' is unresponsive, corrupt, or ineffective.

Thus we could also define two situations which result in other than radical action mobilization. The low efficacy, low trust situation produces an alienated orientation which would lead to withdrawal from any active political participation. The low efficacy, high trust situation also suggests a passive adjustment although in this case the group believes that the government is basically run in the best interests.

In other words 'passive alienation' can be easily confused with the inaction which results from having no reason to question the actions of government.

The analysis of present data combined with Gamson's formulation provides a means to clarify two problems of analyzing alienation : (1) the relationship of one form of alienation to another - sometimes taking action and in other instances refusing to participate in some active way : (2) the conditions under which a given form of alienation produces a specific behavior. Thus, Gamson's dimensions of trust and efficacy are aspects of "system alienation" - they relate to the political system of the community or larger society. The more traditional studies of anomie and normlessness usually deal with general psychological states - impersonal isolation and integration.

A few analyses of the Harijan community as well as other 'alienated' communities have tended to confuse the system and personal levels of analysis. Both are important but each has significantly different implications for understanding human behavior as well as the nature of social action.

The formulation discussed above provides an orientation to the conditions under which a group's 'alienation' is associated with greater or lesser participation in the political process. In Chart (1) the basic mode of analyses is presented. Here we are dealing with the two notions of 'trust' and

(Part of the Legislative ...)

Chart (1)

Relationship of Trust and Efficacy to Political Orientation, Behavior of Regime, and Nature of Political System

TRUST

EFFICACY

High :	Allegiant "Democratic"	Dissident "Unstable"
Low :	Subordinate "Traditional"	Alienated "Totalitarian"

'efficacy'. The first of these ideas focusses on the products or 'outputs' of government or the institutions of society. If the group feels that such structures can be assumed to hold their own interests to some reasonable degree, then the extent of political action and participation is an affirmation or reaffirmation of their legitimization of those institutions

and decision-making bodies. Efficacy is a term that describes the 'inputs' that an individual can have in the political process. To the degree that legislature and governmental agencies are responsive, interested, and take action, then the group may exercise influence using established channels such as state agencies, civic groups, voting, participation in voluntary associations, and legislative committees.

By taking the four possible combinations of trust and efficacy, we could formulate a typology of characteristic orientation of any political system. Chart (1) provides the formulation in which four situations are explained: (1) both efficacy and trust are high. Allegiants feel both that the government will be run in their interests and that they can influence it when necessary; (2) an alienated orientation which would lead to withdrawal from any active political participation; (3) a passive adjustment - demands are seldom presented by interest groups so that responsiveness is not an important issue. The government and the legislature maintains an image of beneficent paternalism; and (4) where the government is regarded as untrustworthy and there is a feeling that something can and should be done about it. Protest and riot actions aimed at changing the system are likely to result.

As formulated above the four cells shown in Chart (1) may be applied usefully to the analysis of alienation and activism among the Harijan legislators of U.P. In the case of the sample of Harijan and high-caste Hindu legislators we utilized the scheme shown in the abstract to describe the individual adaptations of individuals to the larger social system. In the case of patterns of Harijan legislators' responses to political activism, this approach allows us to distinguish orientations that have frequently been lumped under the rubric of 'alienated' or 'militant' (riotist). Instead we can now ask the question: does being active in the political process mean a high degree of integration or potential integration into that system or is it a reflection of protest against the injustice and unresponsiveness of that 'system'.

Using our interviews we constructed indices of 'trust' and 'efficacy'. On the first concept we utilized a series of questions which asked legislators to react to the behavior of the government toward such topics as the death of B.R. Ambedkar, covering up the facts about Harijan killings in various parts

of the state, and attempt of high-caste Hindus to eliminate Harijans from their neighborhoods. A second index was built around responses to the question of whether people working in various state institutions and organizations were responsive to and interested in "the people like yourself". Organizations and institutions included municipal and state government, banks, schools, social welfare agencies, business houses, as well as others. The more often people said such groups had little interest in people like themselves, the higher the score of 'powerlessness' or lack of efficacy.

In Table (1) we have indicated how Harijan and high-caste legislator respondents in our sample were grouped according to the fourfold pattern of adaptation to system functioning. We now examine the pattern reflected from the empirical data.:

Table (1)

DISTRIBUTION OF HARIJAN AND HIGH-CASTE
(LEGISLATORS) IN RELATION TO "SYSTEM" ADAP-
TATION

Harijan Legislators

High Trust - High Efficacy "Allegiant" 47.5%	Low Trust - High Efficacy "Dissident" 29.7%
High Trust - Low Efficacy "Traditional" 11.8%	Low Trust - Low Efficacy "Alienated" 20.7%
Sample: 70	

High-Caste Legislators

High Trust - High Efficacy "Allegiant" 42.6%	Low Trust - Low Efficacy "Dissident" 11.4%
High Trust - Low Efficacy "Traditional" 28.3%	Low Trust - Low Efficacy "Alienated" 17.8%
Sample: 56	

To answer this question we compared persons in the Harijan and high-caste Hindu sample who had different scores on trust and efficacy in terms of following expression of social and political action : (1) helping neighbors; (2) belonging to organizations with neighbors; (3) contacting city and state agencies to express concerns about problems, and (4) voting in the state and national election that occurred prior to this study. In Table (2) the patterns correlating all of these variables are shown.

Table (2)

Forms of System Adaptation and Level of
Social Action

Harijan Legislators

"Allegiant"	"Dissident"
Average amount of mutual aid with neighbors	High mutual aid with neighbors
Below average number of members in neighbor-linked groups	High number of membership in neighbor-linked organizations
Low contact with city/state agencies	Low contact with city/state agencies
Below average voting on state issues	Average voting on state issues
"Traditional"	"Alienated"
Lower on all activism measures	Average mutual aid with neighbors
	Above average number of neighbor linked organizations
	High contact with city/state agencies
	Average voting on state issues

High-Caste Legislators

"Allegiant"	"Dissident"
Above average on all activism measures	Below average on all activism measures
"Traditional"	"Alienated"
Above average on all activism measures	Below average on all activism measures

We find that in almost every instance the connection between a particular kind of system adaptation and the level of political action is different for Harijans compared to high-castes. Thus we observe that high-castes (legislators) who are most loyal to the "system" are highly active in it. For Harijans, those who are Dissident are most active. The exception is contacting city and state agencies. Among Harijans traditional or paternalistic orientations mean little involvement in the local community and beyond. For high-castes there is average or higher involvement. To be alienated among the Harijan legislators means almost as much activism as to be dissident. The same orientation in the high-caste legislators means withdrawal.

So in most ways we find that the relationship between holding particular attitudes about the "system" results in different behaviors when it is a high-caste versus a Harijan legislator involved. One implication of these findings is that theories of community and political action which may apply to high-castes do not appear to be valid for Harijans. Perhaps more significant in terms of focus on the social structure of Harijan legislators is that participation, especially in the neighborhoods, is largely a function of dissident and alienated orientations. In other words, our data show that high-castes become active in their community as a direct result of feeling they can trust that system - even if they are not likely to be heard.

The findings from the data provide evidence for a notion of "victimization" consciousness as an important basis of community action among the Harijan legislators. When individuals come to view the "system" as unlikely to produce "benefits" or where "inputs" are not likely to have an impact on institutions, then among the Harijan legislators this is associated with a high level of community and legislative participation. The policy implications are worth noting at this point. First of all it seems that isolation from the Harijan community is partially a function of loyalty to the external institutions of the state government and more local "establishment" institutions. Consequently if one increases the level of local neighborhood involvement, it does not follow that individuals will then feel more tied in the larger society and higher level of decision-making. The opposite may hold true. Furthermore, if we see efforts at 'mobilizing' the neglected as a product of their lack of contact with institutions and their alienation a result of not knowing how the larger society functions, then such interventions had best be confined to high-caste rather than

Harijan neighborhoods. For our data imply that in the case of the alienated Harijan legislator it is the unresponsiveness and perceived cupidity of these very institutions - based on direct contact - that generates such attitudes.

The implication should also be drawn that such orientations apply to the larger Harijan as well as to the high-caste social structure. In the case of the dissident activist the concentration of the local milieu is even more pronounced than in the case of the alienated activist among the Harijan legislators.

In terms of organizational participation there is yet another pattern which accounts for one type of activist versus another. The Harijan legislator who is a member of some organizations where neighbors are seen and some where neighbors do not belong is significantly more likely to fall into the dissident group than other persons. In other words, the pattern of splitting one's ties between the local neighborhood and the larger Harijan and high-caste legislators brings about a perspective in which activism means a feeling of effectiveness but coupled with distrust of the larger society.

By contrast that Harijan legislator who belongs to organizations made up of exclusively neighbor-linked groups is likely to be an alienated activist, to believe that the "system" is unresponsive and that he can do little to change it. A similar pattern prevails for those Harijan legislators who belong to groups which are not tied to the local neighborhood. In other words, where the Harijan legislator chooses either exclusively neighborhood or exclusively non-neighborhood community and political participation, he is more likely to be alienated rather than dissident in his orientation.

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From our data we can now reconstruct the parameters that comprise a kind of composite of forces shaping the view which we observe as the "radical" or "unstable" component of Harijan legislators dynamics. In our own view we are concerned with identifying a matrix of elements associated with high community and political participation often running counter to traditional participation but not necessarily entithetical to effective community and political change. The dissident orientation among the Harijan legislators is a view that links the often dual allegiance of local neighborhood and larger Harijan community.

This latter concept is often more of a subjective view than a notion of geographical boundaries. It means "Harijan Consciousness", not simply residence in and belonging to an all-Harijan neighborhood and organizations. The dissident

activist has ties both to a local neighborhood and to structures and organizations that do not subsume the local milieu. This means that the neighborhood structure is cohesive and homogeneous enough to have organizations within its boundaries which do not focus exclusively on local neighborhood problems or recruits.

In addition, the dissident activist, while being active in the local neighborhood and the legislature, are often in socio-economic status not on a par with their neighbors. In this sense the individual may have higher income, education, or occupational levels than neighbors. Sometimes the reverse is true. But the identification with the local neighborhood is one source of "creative tension" that the dissident activist may feel. For to be "in the neighborhood" but not totally "of it" can result in desire to flee the scene of such a schism. But where the individual is able to resolve such a dilemma - one which we have argued is a structurally induced problem of Harijan 'bastis' - then a major function of community or group is fulfilled. By serving as the bridge between the local neighborhood and the state government, the dissident activist legislators bring skill and spirit to the local milieu that may otherwise be lacking. The frustration and disappointment of local groups and other activists who have come to expect little from their efforts can be converted by the dissident activist Harijan legislators into a renewed effort at challenging fixed institutions, both Harijan and high-caste.

It is not simply in terms of the structure of organizations and the level of participation that community or group change emerges, but in the determination of individuals to bring about desired reality. Among the Harijan legislators such motivations and their sources would appear to be distinctive - atleast compared to the experience of "some" high-caste legislators. The innovation and experimentation with forms and modes of community and political "institution building"* among the Harijan legislators which have emerged in recent years may grow from the same roots as protests and killings. The dissident and alienated stance of many Harijan legislators is not a function of media exposure or topical "ural-urban crisis" politics. The task of harnessing such discontent is perhaps not so much the problem of the high-castes as it is the first order of priority for the Harijan community.

* For a strongly polemical discussion of such "building" strategies, see Sachchidananda, THE HARIJAN ELITE (Faridabad, Thomson, 1977).

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